



NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER
University of Hawai'i

CONFERENCE EVALUATION REPORT

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE

The Language Learning in Computer Mediated Communities (LLCMC) Conference, a natural outgrowth of the NFLRC's many successful distance education projects & programs, was held on October 11-13, 2009 at the Hawai'i Imin International Conference Center on the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa campus. Highlights included a plenary talk by Gilberte Fustenberg (MIT) on "Virtual Communities = Real Communication?", 16 paper sessions, a special e-poster session showcasing online cultural exchanges based at UH, and the free pre-conference "CULTURA: Web-based Intercultural Exchanges" event (see separate report). Additional special social and educational events included an opening reception with live Hawaiian music and hula following the opening plenary and talks by Naomi Losch on the Hawaiian language and its people to close out the conference. The conference was generously co-sponsored by the UH National Resource Center – East Asia (NRCEA), the UH Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), and the UH Center for Pacific Island Studies (CPIS), with technical support provided by the UH Language Learning Center (LLC)

The LLCMC Conference drew a total of 138 attendees, and though slightly smaller than previous NFLRC-run conferences, it received glowing reviews particularly for its excellent organization, its friendly and helpful staff & volunteers, its welcoming and warm atmosphere, and its diverse and inspiring presentations. Many attendees commented on how they were reinvigorated to try incorporating more technology into their language courses or programs and sharing what they learned in personal, professional, social, and printed forums back home. For a summary of the data and comments from the conference evaluation forms, see page 3.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the field of language education, computer mediated communication (CMC) enables students to interact with one another free of space and time constraints and to participate in communities of learning with their counterparts in the target culture. The Language Learning in Computer Mediated Communities (LLCMC) Conference was created to explore the use of computers as a medium of communication in language learning communities in both research and practice.

Despite utilizing the very same avenues (flyers, listservs, emails, etc.) to publicize our event that we had used for larger conferences, the response to our Call for Proposals was unusually small (only 24 proposals). We attribute this to two factors: 1) the downturn of the U.S. economy in 2009 and the resultant dearth of available travel funding for conferences and 2) competition with other larger, more prominent, technology-focused language conferences such as CALICO.

LLCMC Conference Chairs David Hiple (NFLRC), Stephen Tschudi (NFLRC), Gilberte Furstenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and Dorothy Chun (University of California, Santa Barbara) were responsible for the conference program, including the vetting and selection of the paper proposals received and the scheduling of sessions. Ultimately 16 sessions (including some that were invited) were selected for the eventual conference program. Though a smaller line-up than usual, the conference still drew a sizeable crowd and very high marks all around (see page 3), and a number liked the fact that they only had to choose between two concurrent sessions instead of four or five like at other conferences. The smaller nature of the conference also created a more informal and intimate conference atmosphere, which attendees appreciated. LLCMC Organizing Chair Jim Yoshioka (NFLRC) saw to conference logistics (website, communications, social events, lodging, transportation, registration, and so forth), making sure that both presenters and attendees were welcomed, well informed, and well taken care of.

But don't take our word for it. Please see the summary of LLCMC Conference evaluation data for statistics and comments from attendees.

EVALUATION FORM DATA SUMMARY

We received a total of 42 LLCMC Conference Evaluation forms from the 138 attendees who came for the conference (a 30% rate of return). The data from it is compiled below, along with short summaries for each question.

PART I

1. How did you find out about the conference?

Summary: Most attendees learned about the LLCMC Conference via the internet (e.g., listservs, email, websites, etc.) or from colleagues.

Data:

Journal/Newsletter – 3 (7%)

Flyer – 0 (0%)

Email/WWW – 24 (57%)

Conference – 3 (7%)

Colleague – 17 (40%)

2. The information I received about the conference prior to coming was adequate for my needs.

Summary: NFLRC got high ratings for the information provided on its website and for its email communication with presenters and attendees prior to the event.

Data:

Strongly Agree – 26 (62%)

Agree – 10 (24%)

Neutral – 6 (14%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- “The website was comprehensive in hotel, transport, etc.”
- “Jim’s e-mails were very informative.”

- “Continuous emails from NFLRC providing details concerning the conference before coming to UH Manoa helped me prepare!”

3. The conference was well organized and well run.

Summary: Attendees all agreed that the conference was a very well-organized event that ran smoothly, and they appreciated the informal and friendly environment it created.

Data:

Strongly Agree – 32 (76%)

Agree – 10 (24%)

Neutral – 0 (0%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- “Wonderful”
- “Professional, welcoming, productive”
- “I appreciate that you maintained the schedule and talks began on time”
- “I truly enjoyed the informal environment in which the conference took place.”
- “Extremely well organized”

4. The staff was helpful.

Summary: Conference support staff and volunteers received the highest rating during the conference with attendees reporting that they received immediate and friendly assistance.

Data:

Strongly Agree – 35 (83%)

Agree – 7 (17%)

Neutral – 0 (0%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- “Especially the tech team!!! Very helpful”
- “Jim Yoshioka is conference organizer extraordinaire!”
- “Accessible and friendly too”
- “All my questions were answered immediately and with enthusiasm”

5. The facilities and technical support were adequate.

Summary: The conference venue's beautiful and convenient features and the tech team's expertise and preparation were greatly appreciated, and both achieved very high marks.

Data:

Strongly Agree – 32 (76%)

Agree – 7 (17%)

Neutral – 1 (2%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- "Thank you, Richard {LLC IT Specialist}, for everything"
- "Very nice. The rooms (Pacific/Asia) are great for presenting"
- "Technicians were well prepared and were ready to respond every time."

6. The length of the conference was appropriate.

Summary: Most attendees thought the length of the Cultura pre-conference and LLCMC main conference events (4 days in total) were right on the mark. A number, however, wished that the conference period were either longer or shorter.

Data:

Strongly Agree – 21 (50%)

Agree – 15 (36%)

Neutral – 3 (7%)

Disagree – 1 (2%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- "I felt the length of a presentation was too long."
- "I would have like 1 extra day."
- "'Short and Sweet'. The last 4 days were filled with good ideas and good learning."

7. The presenters were knowledgeable.

Summary: In general, all attendees thought the presenters were knowledgeable in their given topic area. However, a number felt that the quality of presentation and level of expertise sometimes varied markedly among the different presenters.

Data:

Strongly Agree – 15 (36%)

Agree – 26 (62%)

Neutral – 0 (0%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- “Some obviously more expert than others.”
- “It varied. 😊”
- “Some are really good, some topics are very narrow.”
- “Most presentations were too academic, wanted to see more practical hands-on stuff for classroom use. I learned many useful websites, though.”
- “They all had enthusiasm and were very knowledgeable in their topic/area.”

8. The range and diversity of the presentations was good.

Summary: Attendees really liked the range and diversity of the presentations offered at the LLCMC Conference. As evidenced by comments listed later in this report, however, a number of attendees felt there might have been too much diversity in the presentation topics or too small a pool of presentations (the latter was true considering the number of proposals received).

Data:

Strongly Agree – 14 (33%)

Agree – 21 (50%)

Neutral – 7 (17%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

9. Overall, my expectations of the conference were met.

Summary: Attendees on the whole had a positive experience with the LLCMC Conference and felt that they went away with resources, knowledge, or ideas they could use toward better utilizing technology in the classroom or curriculum through online learning communities.

Strongly Agree – 15 (36%)

Agree – 21 (50%)

Neutral – 5 (12%)

Disagree – 0 (0%)

Strongly Disagree – 0 (0%)

Typical comments:

- “Everyone was helpful”
- “I would definitely attend next year.”
- “Very productive and I learned many things that will inform my practice as an educator involved with online communities for language learning.”

PART II

1. Please describe your most valuable learning experience(s) at the conference (e.g., specific presentations, conversation with a presenter/another participant, etc.).

Summary: Attendees specifically mentioned certain presentations to be the best or most helpful, including ones by Furstenberg (plenary), Morioka (Japanese videoconferencing), Gonzales and Lin (LiveMocha), Cetto (dynamic assessment), Zheng (Second Life), Tschudi (language cafés), Cripps (Moodle), and Chun (intercultural exchanges), and many really appreciated the inclusion of Naomi Losch’s special talks on the Hawaiian language and people. Finally, apart from the formal presentations, numerous attendees commented on how the conversations they had between and after sessions also contributed toward their professional growth and enjoyment of the conference.

Typical comments:

- “Presentations by Maria Cetto, Guy Kellogg, Stephen Tschudi, Mark Freiermuth, Tony Cripps, Dorothy Chun, and Naomi Losch (what a fabulous part of the conference!). I was very impressed too with how very cordial and communicative Gilberte & Sabine were. It was such a special treat to have conversations with them”
- “I learned a lot from Prof. Akemi Morioka’s presentation.”
- “Conversation outside of the conference was most valuable. I’ve been to a conference that was especially designed for between conference interaction. So it might be useful to have a longer break between sessions.”
- “The Q&A sessions were useful.”
- “Learning about livemocha.com”
- “For me the contact with the Samoan teachers was the most valuable on a personal level. On a professional level the opportunity to hear and speak with those using technology to support language teaching was very helpful.”
- “Videoconference for Japanese language curriculum, language cafes, language learning communities via social robotics & videoconferencing”
- “Networking & personal connections – I learned many things from my conversations w/people between sessions. Of course, the presentations were both informational & motivating.”
- “I believe that my most valuable learning experience was the ability to interact with experts in the field. This interaction answered many questions and allowed for the exchange of ideas for future research/projects.”
- “I especially like the plenary speech at the opening and the presentation on Second Life”
- “Learning the different resources available”

2. What effect will the conference have on your teaching/professional development?

Summary: The conference served as a catalyst for many conference attendees – some being inspired to try incorporating new technology/methods in their classrooms or programs, some being reinvigorated to continue their old projects with a technological twist, some being motivated to pursue further study and research into CMC work. (The only group that found it difficult to apply many of the ideas at the conference, which tended to lean more toward postsecondary applications, were the groups of local high school teachers who attended the event. As mentioned later in this report, some of them wished for sessions that were more high school-focused and more hands-on.)

Typical comments:

- “Excellent catalytic agent – look forward to following up reading & exploring more about what has been presented here and then to implementing.”
- “Ideas for future language learning programs/curriculum, as well as problems to plan for before launching programs”
- “I would like to try videoconferencing in my classes.”
- “I am more convinced that I would like to continue pursuing LLCMC projects, possibly a dissertation.”
- “New research ideas”
- “I will use my position to further interest in the use of technology in language teaching, speaking with more knowledge and conviction that I had before.”
- “Try to use word association/sentence completion, infuse more cultural components in teaching, investigate more inter-cultural opportunities”
- “Some conference sessions generated considerable discussion and new ideas among my colleagues who attended. We will incorporate some of these ideas in our online course development.”
- “I plan to implement several new techniques in my own teaching & will also share w/colleagues.”
- “Hard to say. High school DOE. No funds to implement.”
- “Re-inspired me to tweak my projects and reinitiate some projects with overseas partners.”
- “I have a broader, more open view of how telecollaboration and Cultura-like programs can be designed. I did hook up with one person & we plan on coordinating a Cultura-like program between our schools. In general, I leave with a renewed & heightened interest in participating in a telecollaboration.”

3. How do you expect to share/disseminate what you have learned with colleagues at your home institution?

Summary: Many said they would go on to discuss what they’ve learned with colleagues and students, in Twitter and blog postings, in reports for their institution, or in future conference presentations, so the knowledge learned in this conference would be further spread and have further impact.

Typical comments:

- “We will have a meeting with my colleagues, as well as an article in our newspaper. It will also be part of a presentation at our conference.”
- “I will write a short written report.”
- “Incorporate it into an online professional development course”
- “Summarize some of the presentations and use our listserv to disseminate the info and wait for ‘fish to bite.’”
- “I will make a presentation at Tech Teachers’ conference in Osaka.”

- “Will share my personal notes with interested colleagues. Share twitter feed with colleagues.”
- “I will look more into using technology to motivate students. Chats & conferencing probably not a reality due to liability, responsibility of monitoring high school students, time difference and tech issues.”
- “We will share ideas with our online course development teams. (Most of our teams had representatives who attended at least part of our conference.)
- “Word of mouth”
- “I’ll share my LLCMC experience with my colleagues and research students through a faculty/dept seminar.”
- “I’ll report on the most realistic & useful presentations”
- “Prior to coming to Hawaii, our School Press Officer said that we will work on a press release concerning this conference so that not only our school will know it but everyone in American Samoa.”

4. What could we have done better at the conference?

Summary: Suggestions for improving the conference included asking all presenters to have handouts, having a record of the conference presentations (either in an online archive or as proceedings), doing a wider call for proposals and advertising prior to the conference, avoiding time delays (within or between sessions), having more hands-on sessions, and creating more opportunities for networking and discussion during the conference.

Typical comments:

- “1) healthier snacks – grapes, bananas cut in segments, etc.; 2) perhaps ask all presenters to have handouts; 3) give guidelines to presenters at pre-conference workshop (Dorothy Chun’s presentation with 3 main points & support for those points, for example, was, in my opinion, FABULOUS. Some others, however, rambled.); 4) opening plenary too rushed – don’t say redundant. Would’ve been fine with no comments.”
- “I think you should urge presenters to follow the time frame. Some started 5 min later, some presented more than 40 min, so that discussion time was cut off short.”
- “Record each session and post it on the website so that more people will have access to the presentation copies. Invite people from literacy studies, educational technology to broaden the focus of LLCMC.”
- “Perhaps wider pre-advertising (& calls for papers) might have attracted better papers. Then again maybe the economy is to blame. The papers were in a way too diverse.”
- “Thematically, the pre-conference could have been not as similar to the actual conference. The pre-conference should/could have been the conference.”
- “There are always time delays because of various reasons, which is unavoidable. But maybe we can try to do a better job.”
- “Perhaps since this was such a small group of people, it would have been great to have opportunities (e.g., working lunch) to talk based on our expertise/interests.”
- “Proceedings”
- “More handouts – online to save paper also okay. More opportunities to network – discussion groups or tables”
- “No suggestions – it was well organized”
- “The names on the name tags were rather small. They should be bigger. I would like to have seen more ‘what didn’t work’ ideas (to know to avoid those techniques in the future).”
- “Most of the sessions were excellent but there was overlap in sessions involving chat. Turn down the air conditioning!”

- “1) Including some hands-on sessions will be good. 2) Including some local cultural visits will be a bonus, e.g. Bishop Museum & Polynesian Village.”
- “Had more information targeted towards school-aged children for high school teachers instead of just focusing on older students.”

5. What did we do particularly well?

Summary: Comments listed here reflected the high ratings and enthusiastic comments listed previously in this report, and a couple called for a second LLCMC Conference.

Typical comments:

- “1) organization; 2) selection of presenters; 3) variety; 4) enforcement of time lines. Thanks for the nice variety of teas too.”
- “Again, I thought the schedule was well maintained. Snacks and social time was good.”
- “Very well organized. Technology team is very responsive. Excellent job!”
- “The organization, website, venue were superb.”
- “I particularly enjoyed the inclusion of Hawaiian culture in the conference.”
- “Very organized, well timed, engaging presenters”
- “Program (I didn’t have any conflicting sessions), relaxing breaks (w/food and coffee/tea), diversity of topics & technology. Please do have LLCMC 2!”
- “Very open exchanges and diversity in conference attendees and participants”
- “Wide variety of presentations w/great keynote anchors!”
- “The sharing of information about the conference (technical & administrative). Also, the volunteers did a tremendous job...they should be highly commended.”
- “Jim is highly commendable for disseminating information timely and efficiently. Mahalo nui loa, Jim!”
- “Everyone was helpful in terms of informing the presenters. Technicians provided good technological assistance. Coordinators were accessible at all times when presenters needed to ask questions. NFLRC staff members were also attentive to/in serving their guests.”
- “Very well organized!! Presenters very well prepared! Well chosen”
- “Aside from the academic, your were very hospitable and welcoming. I greatly appreciate the informal nature of the conference. A formal, stuffy atmosphere would have been very counterproductive. I think participants felt quite comfortable and relaxed, resulting in a high degree of discussion & interaction.”